

The reactivation of the National Military Service Program in Jordan

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Amid heightened regional tensions in the Middle East and domestic threats to its security and stability Jordan is expanding its security measures and strengthening existing international partnerships. The Kingdom is dependent on the US for military and is among the largest recipients of US aid. (1)

Jordan is watching with apprehension the events in neighboring countries, in particular the mounting instability in Syria following the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, the prospect of renewal of the Iranian Israeli hostilities with missiles flying and exploding over its territory. The same goes for the Houthi threat to maritime traffic in the Red Sea severely impacting the port of Akaba. The missiles and drones launched from Yemen, sometimes intercepted over its territory have the potential of causing material damage. The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and the prospects of an Israeli takeover of Gaza city is another major concern mainly in view of the Palestinian population in the Kingdom some of them Gazan who arrived to the Kingdom after the 1967 War. Jordan's decision to reinstate its national service program (compulsory conscription) is directly linked to those mounting regional and domestic challenges.

The Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdallah announced on August 17, 2025 the reactivation of the National Military Service Program. He noted the importance of the program in strengthening

national identity and young people's connection to their homeland, noting that serving with the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army builds character and instills discipline.(2)

On August 20, 2025, the Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Jaafar Hassan, approved the rationale for a draft amendment to the 2025 National Military Service and Reserve Duty Law. The Prime Minister highlighted that the government will coordinate with the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) the implementation of the program starting February 2026, with funding allocated from this year's emergency budget and the 2026 national budget. (3) The structure of the program will include two integrated tracks: a military training component led by the JAF, and a theoretical component delivered by civilian experts in economic, cultural, social, and intellectual fields. (4)

Mandatory conscription in Jordan was abolished in 1991. At the time, men aged 18 to 40 were required to serve two years in the army. Since then, Jordan has relied partially on U.S. military aid and a defense agreement with Washington, under which thousands of American soldiers are stationed in the Kingdom.

The domestic threats

On April 23, 2025 Jordanian Interior Minister, Mazen Al-Faraya outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Jordan. It is now forbidden to be a member of the MB, to promote its ideology, or to publish materials on its behalf. Faraya also ordered the closure of any offices or headquarters used by the MB throughout the country, even if shared with other organizations. (5)

This move followed the exposure on April 15,2025, of a 16-member terror cell affiliated with the Jordanian MB that planned to carry out terror attacks in the Kingdom. According to the Jordanian authorities, the suspects manufactured rockets, stored rockets ready for launching, and planned to manufacture drones. It was also reported that the suspects, who received foreign funding and were trained abroad, had recruited and trained operatives inside and outside the Kingdom. (6)

Jordanian officials were especially concerned about a potential Iranian connection given Tehran's increased attempts to destabilize the Kingdom through violent cross-border smuggling of weapons and drugs, among other activities. (7)

In October 2024, two-armed MB members were killed by Israeli forces after infiltrating the border and opening fire, injuring two Israeli soldiers. The MB initially appeared to endorse the attack, then distanced itself from the incident under pressure, once again claiming that the suspects were

acting individually and not as representatives of the group. Yet MB leaders still tacitly legitimized the infiltration as motivated by “supporting the resistance.” (8)

Jordan and international security partnerships

Jordan relies on the foreign military support mainly from the USA and partially from other European Union members. Jordan is a vital U.S. partner in a wide range of regional security files, with a shared goal of a stable, secure, and prosperous Middle East. The United States works with Jordan to increase cooperation on border and maritime security, arms transfers, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism. (9)

Jordan’s stability and security are priorities for the United States, which has provided Jordan with assistance since the late 1960s. The United States and Jordan have memorialized bilateral foreign assistance in three non-binding Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) (FYs 2010-2014, 2015-2017, and 2018-2022), demonstrating a strong, multi-year U.S. commitment to Jordan’s security and stability. Under the current five-year, \$1.275 billion per year MOU, the United States outlines the intention to provide a minimum of \$350 million of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) each year. (10)

In November 2024 the European Council approved a 13.25-million-euro (\$13.9 million) package for the Jordanian armed forces under the European Peace Facility. Funds cover detection and countermeasure systems, surveillance, reconnaissance, mobility, and engineering capabilities. (11)

Another boost to the Jordanian economy is a new grant of 500 million Euro to support economic projects. (12)

National Recruitment - background

Conscription first began in Jordan after an Israeli raid on a West Bank border village of Samu' in 1966. The government issued an emergency conscription act whereby males were to be drafted for training and service with regular military units for periods of up to two years. This law became inoperative when the security situation in Jordan stabilized.

Five years ago, Jordan partially reintroduced conscription under then-prime minister Omar Razzaz. On September 9, 2020, Razzaz supervised the signing of a MoU between the government and the army in the presence of Labor Minister Nidal Bataineh and head of the joint chiefs of the Jordanian Armed Forces, Maj. Gen. Yousef Huneiti. (13)

Under the terms of the MoU, men will undertake three months of military training and all conscripts will be skill trained and placed in private-sector roles for the remaining nine months of their service.

They will also be enrolled in the social security program and those without family health insurance will be provided with cover for the duration of their conscription period. During army training and service, conscripts will be banned from using their mobile phones, but they will be allowed end-of-month vacations. (14) The ban of using mobile phones is interesting. It is probably intended to keep away the new recruits, as far as possible, from the social media.

In a press conference, the minister of Labor, Nidal Bataineh, justified the decision to resume compulsory military service in light of the severe unemployment situation in Jordan due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and the improvement in the economic and employment situation in the Kingdom, the renewal of compulsory service in the Jordanian army was not implemented and the country maintained a volunteer-based military system with no mandatory conscription at that time.

In October 2024, the General Command of the Jordan Armed Forces–Arab Army (JAF), through its Directorate of Personnel Affairs/Mobilization Division, has called on Jordanian males aged 18-40 to rectify their status by obtaining a valid military service document to avoid travel delays.

Summary

The reactivation of the mandatory military recruitment program certainly addresses genuine national security concerns which require more manpower. The prospect of a sudden withdrawal of the American led coalition forces from Syria, some of them in the Al-Tanaf base nearby the Syrian Jordanian border is a real one and may expose it to serious threats. The renewed clashes between the Druze community in Southern Syria and the Bedouin tribes there is also a major concern. The international border between Syria and Jordan is a result of post-World War I colonial arrangements which divided traditional tribal areas without consideration of their needs. Ever since part of the tribal population on both sides of the border is blood related there. This poses a risk of uncontrolled movements of members of those tribes across the border and vice versa under one pretext or another.

The decision to renew compulsory service in the Jordanian army is part of a broader move to strengthen the Jordanian army's capabilities along its long borders with Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Israel and to maintain the country's internal security against terrorist and subversive activities.

However, it is not clear whether this time the program will be fully implemented. If fully implemented it should include also men from the Palestinian community, many of whom are full Jordanian citizens. It should also put an end to the popular discontent of many that the children of the "Pashas" (high ranking state officials) are somehow exempt from military service.

It should be taken into account that the mandatory recruitment that will add thousands of soldiers and officers to the Jordanian army will further burden Jordan's precarious economy due to the need to train the soldiers, arm them, possibly require the establishment of new units, and of course, pay salaries. But it may keep thousands of unemployed young men off the streets, at least for a while.

Notes:

- 1) Giulia Bernacchi, Jordan to Bring Back Compulsory Military Service After Three Decades, the defense post, August 18, 2025.
- 2) Crown Prince announces reactivation of National Military Service Program, the Royal Hashemite Court, August 17, 2025.
- 3) Cabinet Approves Mandatory Military Service Amendments, Vocational Training, Data Protection, and Investment Initiatives, Jordan news agency, August 20, 2025.
- 4) New National Military Service program announced, targeting youth born in 2007, the Jordan times, August 18, 2025.
- 5) Jordan Outlaws Muslim Brotherhood (MB) Movement Following Exposure of MB Terror Cell Linked to Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, MEMRI, April 23, 2025.
- 6) MEMRI, Nidaalwatan.com, April 17, 2025.
- 7) Gaith al Omari, The Brotherhood May Have Pushed Jordan Too Far This Time, Policy Watch 4032, April 22, 2025.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) U.S. Security Cooperation with Jordan, Fact Sheet, US Department of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, January 20, 2025.
- 10) Ibid.
- 11) Giulia Bernacchi, Jordan to Bring Back Compulsory Military Service After Three Decades, the defense post, August 18, 2025.Repetition of #1
- 12) EU and Jordan take important step towards delivery of €500 million to support Jordan's macro-financial stability and reforms, Europa- Kommissionen, August 25, 2025.

13) News, September 9, 2020.

14) Ibid.